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Chairman: Mr. ABELIAN (Armenia)
(Vice-Chairman)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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In the absence of Mr. Vilchez Asher (Nicaragua), Mr. Abelian (Armenia), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 138: ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY ASPECTS OF THE FINANCING OF THE UNITED NATIONS PEACE-KEEPING OPERATIONS (continued)

(a) FINANCING OF THE UNITED NATIONS PEACE-KEEPING OPERATIONS (continued) (A/50/874, A/50/876 and A/50/897)

Support account for peace-keeping operations

1. Mrs. ARCHINI (Italy), speaking on behalf of the European Union, recognized that the current system for the funding and utilization of the support account needed to be adapted to the new backstopping requirements of peace-keeping operations. With regard to the comprehensive review of the support account proposed by the Secretary-General in his report (A/50/876), the European Union concurred with the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) that the General Assembly should authorize, for the period from 1 April to 30 June 1996, the establishment of a total of 370 posts for backstopping staff and related non-post requirements in the amount of $7,213,300, that amount to be financed on the basis of the current support account funding methodology and formula. Secondly, with regard to the recommendation that the General Assembly should authorize 355 posts for backstopping staff for the period from 1 July 1996 to 30 June 1997, together with related non-post requirements, at a total cost of $31.3 million, to be appropriated and assessed on the basis of the scale used for peace-keeping assessments, the European Union would prefer to reserve its position until the budget estimates for all peace-keeping operations for that period were submitted when the Committee resumed its work in May, and requested the Secretary-General to submit a report on those aspects of the financing of the support account referred to by the Advisory Committee in paragraphs 18 to 34 of its report (A/50/897), and by the Board of Auditors. The European Union wished to point out that the question of the transfer of the 26 permanent posts from the support account to the regular budget must be resolved. With regard to the formula for the funding of the support account, the European Union agreed with the Advisory Committee that the resources for the account should be prorated among the individual peace-keeping operation budgets rather than appropriated and assessed separately.

2. Mrs. INCERA (Costa Rica), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the support account should be given the resources necessary to cover all the backstopping activities of peace-keeping operations, but that it should not be forgotten that those activities, as well as the corresponding backstopping posts, were temporary.

3. With regard to the Secretary-General's request that 355 posts should be funded from the support account for the period from 1 July 1996 to 30 June 1997, the Group of 77 and China believed, as the Advisory Committee stated in paragraph 18 of its report, that "the lack of consistently applied criteria

appears to have led to arbitrary and disparate staffing requests". That was clear from an analysis of the staffing of the Planning Division and the Field Administration and Logistics Division, which were among those most affected by the proposed reductions in the number of posts funded from the support account, a situation which was unacceptable and should be rectified.

4. The Group of 77 and China requested the Secretariat to provide additional information on the criteria used to determine the priorities indicated in annex III to the report of the Secretary-General (A/50/876) and expressed their concern at the low priority assigned to some of the activities linked to requests for reimbursement, to which Member States, in particular those which contributed troops, attached the greatest importance. They also requested the Secretary-General to submit for the Assembly's consideration, before 15 June 1996, a proposal for the redeployment of posts which would include the strengthening of the unit concerned. Moreover, they found it profoundly disturbing that the Secretary-General had redeployed various posts in violation of the provisions of General Assembly resolution 49/250, and they would like to know the criteria which had led to the redeployment measures. They would also like information about the regular budget posts which were being used for purposes other than those authorized by the General Assembly.

5. With regard to the ratio of support account staff to gratis military officers, the Group of 77 and China shared the concern expressed by the Advisory Committee and endorsed the recommendations in paragraphs 26, 27 and 28 of its report.

6. The Group of 77 and China requested the Secretary-General to submit, by 15 June, proposals which would correct the existing imbalances in such important areas as logistics and planning. They also requested him to submit, during the fifty-first session, the report requested in paragraph 10 of resolution 49/250, which should include the guidelines that should govern the policy of secondment to the Department of Peace-keeping Operations, measures to maintain equitable geographical distribution in that Department, and proposals to maintain a balance between military staff and support account staff. Future reports on the support account should include detailed information on the existing staffing table, including posts financed by voluntary contributions and staff on loan from Governments, as well as the geographical composition. The recruitment of support account staff should be governed by the principle of equitable geographical distribution. The Group of 77 and China also supported the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on trust funds and requested the Secretary-General in future to provide full information on those funds and to ensure total transparency in their management.

7. With regard to the Secretary-General's proposals concerning the formula for funding the support account and his recommendation that resources for the support account should be appropriated and assessed separately, the Group of 77 and China felt that there was no justification for such a proposal. While the formula for the funding of the support account should cover the real resource requirements, it should reflect the temporary character of the backstopping activities. They therefore supported the proposal made by the Advisory Committee in paragraph 37 of its report. They also requested the Secretary-

General to include in his future reports on the support account an assessment of the feasibility and effectiveness of the formula selected.

8. Lastly, the Group of 77 and China supported the recommendations made by the Advisory Committee in paragraphs 13 and 33 of its report concerning the resource requirements for the periods from 1 April to 30 June 1996 and from 1 July 1996 to 30 June 1997.

9. Mr. SURIE (India) said it was important to provide the Secretary-General with the necessary resources to manage and backstop peace-keeping operations, including those which had been completed but which had not yet been totally liquidated.

10. The resource requirements for the support account should be reviewed and approved annually by the General Assembly on the basis of the fluctuations in the number and complexity of the operations and the state of liquidation of those which had been completed. It was therefore a welcome development that the Secretary-General had undertaken a "bottom-up" review of resource requirements for peace-keeping operations for the period from 1 July 1996 to 30 June 1997. His delegation supported that methodology for determining the resource requirements and hoped that the General Assembly would endorse it. However, as the Advisory Committee had pointed out in its report, that review, based on inconsistently applied criteria, appeared to have led to arbitrary and disparate staffing requests. The proposal that a considerable number of Professional posts in the Department of Peace-keeping Operations should be replaced with gratis military officers, particularly in the Planning Division and the Lessons Learned Unit, was a disturbing one. It would result in an excessively high percentage of gratis military officers, which would affect both the planning of work and standards, create a system of dual allegiance and adversely affect the need for institutionalization. Peace-keeping was the common task of Member States and should be financed mainly from assessed contributions. His delegation supported the Advisory Committee's recommendation that the imbalance should be corrected through the restoration of United Nations-financed posts in the Planning Division of the Department of Peace-keeping Operations and similar measures in the Lessons Learned Unit.

11. The Secretary-General should also pay attention to the observations of the Advisory Committee in paragraphs 29 and 30 of its report. Adequate staff must be provided to handle the claims for reimbursement submitted by Member States which had contributed troops and equipment. As requested in General Assembly resolution 50/214 of 23 December 1995, the Secretary-General should review the division of responsibilities of the regional divisions of the Department of Peace-keeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs with a view to eliminating duplication and maximizing the utilization of resources. His delegation also supported the Advisory Committee's recommendation that the General Assembly should revert at an early date to the question of the overall ratio of gratis military officers to United Nations-financed posts, and hoped that the Secretary-General would submit a report on the subject prior to the commencement of the fifty-first session.

12. With regard to the proposed funding mechanism, his delegation shared the Advisory Committee's view that the Secretariat's proposal for the separate

assessment and appropriation of the resources for the support account need not be considered at the present stage. The annual resource requirements should be prorated among the individual peace-keeping operation budgets.

13. Lastly, his delegation supported the Secretary-General's proposal that a staffing level of 355 posts and total resources of $37.2 million gross should be authorized for the 12-month period commencing 1 July 1996, subject to the immediate redistribution of posts before that date so that the number of United Nations-financed posts in the Planning Division would constitute at least 50 per cent of the total staffing of that Division.

14. Mr. ODAGA-JALOMAYA (Uganda) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. It welcomed the recommendations of the Board of Auditors, in paragraph 12 of its report (A/50/874, annex), aimed at improving the functioning of the support account, but regretted that the Board had been unable to audit such areas as extrabudgetary resources and the use of loaned personnel. The Board's recommendations should be fully implemented and the Board should audit all other outstanding questions and make appropriate recommendations to the General Assembly.

15. Simplicity had to be restored to the procedures for the authorization of expenditures under the support account. It was regrettable that the Secretariat had not provided information on the use of the resources in that account during the past calendar year, as was required under resolution 49/250.

16. With regard to the concept of permanent core capacity, referred to in the report of the Secretary-General, his delegation believed that it was no longer appropriate to distinguish between core and non-core posts and activities in connection with the support account.

17. His delegation supported the staffing level of 370 posts and related non-post requirements for the period from 1 April to 30 June 1996, to be financed on the basis of the current support account funding methodology and formula. Since the Department of Peace-keeping Operations had been able to operate effectively with 38 vacant posts, he proposed that those posts should be abolished. His delegation supported the staffing level of 355 posts for the period from 1 July 1996 to 30 June 1997, but did not believe that the 26 support account posts should be transferred to the regular budget. A thorough review needed to be made of the results of the comprehensive "bottom-up" review of backstopping requirements at Headquarters called for by the Advisory Committee.

18. An issue that was of great concern to his delegation was that of personnel loaned to the United Nations by Member States free of charge. The Secretariat should provide all the information which the Advisory Committee had requested so that the question could be studied in detail. However, his delegation wished to point out that the increase in the number of gratis military officers on loan from Governments to the Department of Peace-keeping Operations proposed by the Secretary-General would result in an unacceptable imbalance in the staffing which needed to be corrected. Moreover, with the replacement of Professional staff by gratis military officers on short-term contracts, the Organization was losing some of its key Professional staff.

19. The majority of the gratis military officers were assigned to the Field Administration and Logistics Division and to the Planning Division of the Office of Planning and Support of the Department of Peace-keeping Operations, which were among the units most affected by the proposed reduction in posts funded from the support account. His delegation called for transparency and full disclosure of the estimated costs and valuation of the services rendered by those officers.

20. His delegation believed that there should be broader geographical distribution among gratis military officers to enable the developing countries to be represented. It requested the Secretariat to provide information on the current geographical distribution of those officers.

21. His delegation also called on the Secretariat to formulate a proposal for the reduction of the number of General Service posts funded from the support account, since it was too high in comparison with the number of Professional posts.

22. The redeployment of posts by the Department of Peace-keeping Operations should be in accordance with General Assembly resolution 49/250.

23. The General Assembly should be kept informed of the funds received by the United Nations, including extrabudgetary resources and trust funds; there was a need to improve procedures for providing such information to Member States. He called for Member States to be fully informed of activities financed from the trust funds established by the Secretary-General in support of peace-keeping operations.

24. The way in which requests for reimbursement by troop-contributing countries were being processed gave cause for concern. Member States which had not been reimbursed were subsidizing the Organization and allowing it to continue to function.

25. With regard to the rental of two floors of the FF building, his delegation shared the views expressed by the Advisory Committee in paragraph 32 of its report (A/50/897).

26. Mr. JAREMCZUK (Poland) said that in the past the lack of proper planning of operations had been frequent, and had been widely criticized, in view of which Poland, together with other Member States, had advocated the establishment of a competent planning service, which had finally been set up some years earlier. The Secretary-General confirmed in his report (A/50/876) the importance of planning, but, regrettably, the report proposed the virtual liquidation of the Mission Planning Service through the elimination of posts. His delegation agreed with the Advisory Committee that the review of the posts presented by the Secretary-General in his report had a number of shortcomings. The most crucial were the lack of a clear statement of criteria for the review and the absence of an overall evaluation of the total requirements of the various units whose staff were funded from the support account. His delegation considered the distribution of posts proposed by the Secretary-General to be unacceptable, and therefore firmly supported the recommendation of the Advisory Committee in paragraph 27 of its report that the Secretary-General should take immediate

action to reduce the number of United Nations-financed posts proposed to be suppressed in the Planning Division of the Department of Peace-keeping Operations.

27. Ms. RODRIGUEZ (Cuba) said that her delegation endorsed the comments made by the delegation of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. She had decided to support, not without some reluctance, the proposed change in the methodology for financing the support account, although it would have been appropriate to have broadened the funding formula to allow for military personnel and civilian police and to have strictly applied the principle of full-cost budgeting rather than civilian personnel costs alone. It would also have been appropriate to have agreed on how to incorporate the liquidation phase of missions in the support account. Should the proposed methodology be adopted, the General Assembly would need to monitor its application carefully and the Secretary-General should provide detailed information on its suitability and effectiveness.

28. It was unfortunate that there was still no report on various aspects related to the secondment of military and civilian personnel to the Department of Peace-keeping Operations. The use of seconded personnel should not have a negative impact on the number of Professional posts; otherwise the impartial nature of the Organization would be impaired. Her delegation asked the Secretariat to submit updated information on the number of officers seconded by Governments and their nationalities and endorsed the view of the Advisory Committee in paragraph 26 of its report that efforts should be made to broaden geographic representation in that category of personnel.

29. Her delegation did not question the establishment of trust funds as a means of obtaining resources for peace-keeping operations, although it was regrettable that the Secretary-General's report did not draw the attention of Member States to the establishment of such funds. The Secretariat should provide detailed information on the personnel and activities financed from those funds.

30. Mr. FATTAH (Egypt) endorsed the comments made by the delegations of India, Uganda, Cuba and Costa Rica, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. A fair and speedy solution must be found to the question of financing the support account, not only to provide backstopping for operations but also to give those contributing on a provisional basis to activities funded from the account the security they needed to act effectively.

31. He supported the recommendations made by the Advisory Committee in paragraphs 13 and 33 of its report on the funding requested for Headquarters backstopping requirements. He also agreed with the Advisory Committee that proper recognition must be given to the importance of backstopping activities at the stage of the drawdown or closure of missions, including the final closure of accounts. Similarly, he endorsed the comments of the Advisory Committee in paragraphs 26, 27 and 28 of its report regarding gratis military officers. The imbalance between such military personnel and staff with posts financed from the support account was disquieting. In common with the Group of 77 and China, he thought that the relevant procedures should conform to clear guidelines.

32. The support account should receive all necessary resources for the backstopping of peace-keeping operations. A further cause for concern was the apparent incoherence of the criteria applied in formulating requests for posts, together with the lack of criteria for determining priorities. The handling of requests for reimbursement must be improved.

33. Mr. ZHANG (China), referring to the post-mission activities mentioned in paragraph 11 of document A/50/876, asked what backstopping activities had been carried out following the completion of operations such as those in Cambodia and Namibia, and how long those activities had lasted.

34. Mr. YEO (Deputy Director, Peace-keeping Financing Division), responding to the question put by the representative of China, drew attention to tables 3 and 4 in document A/50/876, and said that five years was allowed for processing claims for compensation or reimbursement and for other administrative and other measures relating to missions. As indicated in table 5, activities relating to UNCTAD, UNIIMOG and UNMLTIC had already been completed, but backstopping was still being provided to other completed missions.

35. Mr. ADZA (Chairman of the Audit Operations Committee), speaking on behalf of the Chairman and other members of the United Nations Board of Auditors, said that the Board had taken note of the comments made by the delegations of the Russian Federation, Uganda and Costa Rica, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, concerning the need to audit extrabudgetary resources and the use of loaned military personnel. The Board welcomed the comment by the Advisory Committee that the Board should be consulted before deadlines for submission of its special reports were established.

36. The Board had also taken note of the ACABQ request for follow-up to implementation of the Board's recommendations as approved by the General Assembly; the Board would plan its programme of work accordingly.

37. The CHAIRMAN said that the Committee had concluded its general discussion on the item.

The meeting rose at 4.04 p.m.